

2005

## An Exploration into the Impact of Drama and Theatre on Policy

Mary Moynihan

*Technological University Dublin, mary.moynihan@tudublin.ie*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/aacomusbk>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Moynihan, M. & Carney, R. (2005) An Exploration into the Impact of Drama and Theatre on Policy, Dublin, Smashing Times Theatre Company.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Conservatory of Music and Drama at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Books/Book Chapters by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact [arrow.admin@tudublin.ie](mailto:arrow.admin@tudublin.ie), [aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie](mailto:aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#)  
Funder: National Lottery through Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

A hand is shown from the bottom left, reaching upwards. In the top right corner, a blue book is shown from a high angle, appearing to float or be held. The background is a bright blue sky with soft, white clouds. A thin, light blue horizontal line runs across the middle of the page, passing behind the ampersand in the title.

An exploration  
into the Impact of

# DRAMA & THEATRE on Policy

**FUNDED BY:**

The National Lottery through the Department  
of Community Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs

**PRESENTED BY:**

Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd

Coleraine House, Coleraine Street, Dublin 7

Tel: (01) 865 6613 Email: [info@smashingtimes.ie](mailto:info@smashingtimes.ie) Web: [www.smashingtimes.ie](http://www.smashingtimes.ie)

**T**he aim of this booklet is to begin a journey of exploration into the dynamics of drama and theatre and the relationship they can have in influencing policy. This booklet by no means sets out to provide all the answers – we hope through the initial research conducted that we can, in even a small way, encourage further discussion and research in relation to using drama and theatre to influence policy. Contained within is a summary of a larger report entitled ‘Evaluation of the Impact of Drama and Theatre on Policy’ prepared by Rose Carney for Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd.

Companies like Smashing Times... consistently produce work that is self-consciously political, work that seeks to provoke and engage debate about the way we organize society and our lives

*Village Magazine*

Smashing Times Theatre Company has a deserved reputation for exploring social issues with sensitivity and in depth... this work points the way rather than draws maps. Smashing Times must continue with it

*The Irish Times*

## THE BOOKLET HAS BEEN PREPARED BY:

### ROSE MC CARNEY

*BBS (Hons) MMII (Grad)*

T.F.M. Ltd

Derryvalley, Ballybay, Co Monaghan

### MARY MOYNIHAN

Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd

In 2005, the National Lottery through the Community and Voluntary Grants Scheme, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs awarded a

grant to Smashing Times Theatre Company Limited to undertake exploratory research to evaluate the impact of drama and theatre on policy. The purpose of the research was to:

Determine the influence, if any, drama and theatre has on policy. For example in relation to social policy; issues such as marginalisation, disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion.

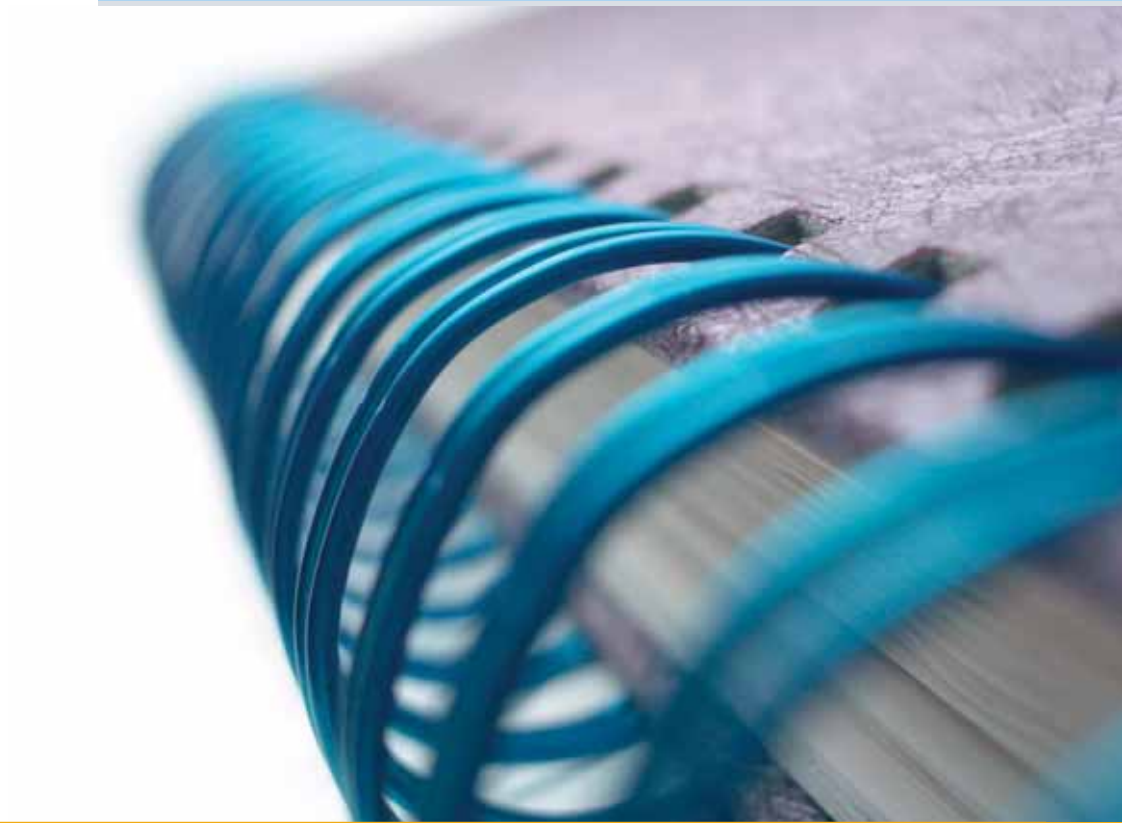
Identify national and international models of best practice, existing and recommended, for using drama and theatre to influence policy and

including work from Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd. Begin to explore ways that drama and theatre can influence policy in the future and the supports required.

### Research findings indicate:

Drama and theatre have the capacity to impact on policy. Some drama and theatre projects set out with a specific focus to influence policy – for example the techniques developed by Augusto Boal, the Brazilian theatre director and theorist.

Theatre, in an Irish context, can impact policy when influencing



policy has been included in the strategic plan from design stage. Drama and theatre have not overly focused on policy influence as an issue, however the potential for participatory drama and theatre to influence policy is substantial, should the artists and participants wish to include this as an aim of the work at planning stages.

### Research Indicators

Information was gathered through the utilisation of primary and secondary research, through the holding of a seminar and through liaison with those who have an

interest, vested and otherwise, in drama and theatre.

In August 2005, a questionnaire survey was conducted with professional practitioners involved in the arts and individuals and organisations working in areas designated as disadvantaged. Respondents were grouped under two categories a) professional practitioners and b) community context; as feedback from the two sectors though common in areas can be quite diverse in specific issues. The survey attained over a 50% response rate, remarkable given that from July until the

beginning of September is notoriously the holiday period. A seminar was held on 28 September 2005 at the Smashing Times offices in Coleraine Street, Dublin. Those participating in the questionnaire survey were invited to attend, together with additional contacts including University College Dublin. As there was an attendance of people from different areas of work including professional theatre practice, community development and education the seminar was structured as an informal discussion session.

# Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd

Smashing Times is a professional theatre company committed to innovation, the creative process, artistic excellence, and equal participation for all. The vision is for a creative society where theatre is open for all to make or enjoy. The company was established in 1991 by a group of women actors who met at the Focus Theatre, Dublin. These women were interested in challenging the elitist position that drama and theatre sometimes holds in Irish society. The company develops and presents original professional productions and provides a forum for professional artists to work alongside people in many different contexts and communities.

## Artistic director:

Mary Moynihan

## Company Manager:

Freda Manweiler

## Patrons:

Maeve Binchy,  
Tim Pat Coogan, Brian Friel,  
Robert Kee

## Board Members:

Margaret Toomey, Gillian  
Hackett, Eric Weitz,  
Patricia Kennedy

## Associate Artists:

Paul Kennedy, Andy Hinds, Chrissie  
Poulter, Ann Sheehy, Ena May,  
Carol Walsh, Wilma Nicholl

## The company specialises in:

Developing original, professional  
theatre productions of a high  
quality to explore themes including  
social and political issues relevant  
to people's lives with an emphasis  
on the wide and varied spectrum  
of women's experiences.

Developing high quality drama and  
theatre practice at a local level by

- (a) Implementing long-term  
innovative projects involving  
professional artists working in  
partnership with local  
communities and communities  
of interest and
- (b) Working in partnership with a  
range of organisations and  
agencies to actively promote  
inclusiveness and participation  
in drama and theatre practice.

The provision of expertise and  
training to a wide range of people  
and organisations throughout  
Ireland including accredited  
training at third level through  
University College Dublin.

Using drama and theatre for  
transformation and to promote  
social justice. The company has  
long-term expertise in developing  
models of best practice for using

drama and theatre to promote  
peace building and reconciliation  
and for anti-racism work.

Smashing Times have been at the  
forefront in designing, developing  
and delivering professional pieces of  
work, with a particular focus on  
addressing issues such as social  
exclusion, disadvantage, poverty and  
marginalisation in their emerging  
forms and in bringing drama out to a



wider audience where anyone can participate and enjoy.

Projects include Women Acting for a Better World which uses drama workshops and a professional theatre performance to explore the experiences of women in war and Acting for the Future, a project using drama workshops and a professional theatre performance to promote positive mental health and to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention.

Smashing Times runs Drama in the Docklands, an ongoing Dublin

Docklands Development Authority programme that promotes creativity and access to theatre skills in the docklands area of Dublin and is run with City Quay National School and St Joseph's National School, East Wall.

Smashing Times runs two accredited training programmes in partnership with the Mid-Ulster Women's Network and The National University of Ireland/University College Dublin – the accrediting body. The programmes are the Certificate in Community Drama and the

Diploma in Drama Facilitation Skills. The latter is the first course in Ireland to provide accredited training at university level for drama facilitation within a community context.

The training is funded by the Cross-Border Consortium under the EU Peace 11 Programme as part-financed by the UK and Irish Governments and aims to develop the use of drama and theatre to address peace building and reconciliation.

Smashing Times Theatre Company is supported by Dublin City Council.



*Smashing Times Theatre Company: (left to right) Mary Moynihan, Artistic Director; Paul Kennedy, Drama Facilitator; Kate Murphy, Project Coordinator; Freda Manweiler, Company Manager.*

# Drama and Theatre as an Art form

For the purposes of this booklet, the term drama refers to the drama workshop process; the methodology is drama and there is usually not an audience, everyone takes part in the workshop. It can be described as “a collaborative event” (House of Games, page xv), which might have one of the following objectives: recreation, learning, experimentation, debate, confidence building, and research into social conflict or even devising a play.

The professional drama facilitator guides the drama workshop process and “facilitates, that is, ‘makes easy’ the task of seizing the theatre language” (House of Games, page xvi), “not quite a teacher nor a director” (House of Games, page xiii). The people taking part in the drama workshop are referred to as participants.

The term theatre refers to the production and presentation of a professional piece of work by one or more actors to a public audience.

Drama/theatre in the community can incorporate the activities of professional artists and artistic companies who contribute to the community, by using drama and theatre as creative processes involving local participants working in collaboration with the

professional artists.

This document focuses on the use of drama and theatre in the contexts of both professional and community theatre practice and in that area where professional and community theatre practice intermingle.

In relation to the term ‘community’, there are many different types of communities and communities of interest. Some communities are fixed, others are fluid, a community can be a specific group of people, family, friends, it can be a community of interests or experiences, and it can be local, national or international.

Drama and theatre in a community context along with other art forms fall under the umbrella title of what has been referred to at varying times as participatory arts, community arts, arts in context, audience access etc. Regardless of titles, the work is about professional artists working in partnership and collaboration with a diverse range of people, in diverse settings, through multiple and creative ways of working. There are many different models of participatory arts practice and rather than using exact definitions it is better to describe core values that underpin the work such as collaboration,

partnership, participation, inclusiveness, equality, openness, risk-taking and experimentation.

Although influencing policy is a main focus of this booklet, influencing policy is not always a part of drama and theatre. It is only where the individual, group and/or organisation (artists and/or participants) sees policy influence as an issue that it may then be incorporated into the aims and desired outcomes of a particular project.

In the experience of Smashing Times, we believe that the emphasis should always be on the quality and integrity of the artistic process and ensuing artistic benefits while also recognising transformative benefits. This booklet does not intend to infer that the arts is all about policy influence, and nor should it be. Using drama and theatre to raise awareness of a particular issue is an exciting process, however, the artistic process should always remain central and primary importance be given to the artistic merit, content and process. If policy becomes the sole focus, then the art is secondary and that is of no benefit.

Smashing Times Theatre Company is made up of professional artists and the

company produces professional theatre productions. The company is also equally committed to working in partnership with a diverse range of people and communities and is constantly evolving new and innovative creative processes that involve local communities and communities of interest working in collaboration with professional artists. Although a leaning towards issue-based work has evolved naturally over the years, artistic and creative processes are always to the fore as we are primarily an arts organisation and the artistic process must remain central. However, there is a powerful creative energy in a theatre that wants to support social change. As Peter Brook says, “the wish to change society, to get it to confront its eternal hypocrisies, is a great powerhouse” (The Empty Space, page 70).

### What is policy?

When one says policy, what do you think of? A governmental action? Or do you think of something maybe closer to home, maybe your organisation has a recruitment policy?

Policy as described by the Oxford English Dictionary is: “a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organisation or individual” The origin of the word is the Greek *politeia* “citizenship” from *polis* “city”.

Policy is a very broad term and can be applied to a number of



*Bibbi Larsson performing in Testimonies.*

courses of action. Policy can be organisational, legislative, public, or governmental. For example:

Organisational policy – different policies within the organisation: Health & Safety Policy (Businesses); Artistic Policy (Arts Organisations); Equality Policy (Commercial & Community Organisations).

Legislative: for example: International (European Court of Human Rights); National (Governmental); Regional (Health System); Local (Local Authority).

### Why would you want to influence policy?

There are potentially an infinite number of reasons as to why an individual, organisation or group would ‘like’ to influence policy:

It may be that there is a specific issue where it is felt a different approach and/or procedure would work better but needs a cohesive agreed approach to be

implemented successfully – e.g. implementing a speed limit on a main road, running through a built-up area.

It may be that a whole group of people (population, town, city, county, company) can see a viable way of doing something in a better way which is not currently being employed – e.g. lobbying, referenda.

It may be that you see a wrong doing and you want to see it corrected.

It may be that you want to improve a situation, possibly for yourself, for your family, for affected persons, your community or for your country – for example incorporating the Arts into health strategies for the elderly.

### Understanding the Policy Machine

The parameters of this booklet cannot facilitate a comprehensive guide to the various methods to influence policy: that will require





*Bibbi Larsson and Naoise Moynihan Ó Bradaigh in a publicity still for Testimonies.*

follow-on research and documentation. However there are a couple of areas of food for thought:

Though policy comes in many forms, the general characteristics are the same and relatively the same approach can be applied. Research how the policy you wish to influence is developed, implemented and reviewed. Who are the policy influencers? How is the policy developed, what are the factors involved?

The policy process represents a number of elements – a series of interconnected mechanisms – systems of governance, political priorities, institutions, legislative process, negotiation processes, research, policy development, information dissemination.

### A Sample of Potential Policy Influencers:

- Green papers, strategic reviews of government services
- Attending consultation meetings & making submissions
- National annual budgets
- Lobbying social partners
- Proactive lobbying with government & statutory bodies - meetings with political parties & key policy makers, publicise results of research
- Referendums
- Voting and participating in local parties
- Local and general elections
- Joining local community fora
- Joining and building collective campaigns
- The media
- Information sessions

- Holding conferences
- Informing institutions and civil servants

### Principal Outcomes:

Research conducted indicates drama and theatre has influenced policy for example on a local (Drama in the Docklands) and international basis (Augusto Boal). Drama and theatre have had a direct influence on policy in an Irish context and in a global context; at home it may be micro policy (local authority decisions) with some affect on legislative policy (Department of Health) but it is in the global environment that we see drama and theatre truly influencing policy through the work of Augusto Boal (see below for further details).

It would appear that the more 'thought out' the policy influence objective, the greater the success. Evidently well-structured and organised pieces of work can affect and influence policy particularly when policy influence is part of the project's initial aims and objectives. For policy influence to take place a) develop a clear message b) the message is of significance c) the message is presented in a form comprehensible to the policy influencers d) the message portrayed is within the remit of the policy influencers and e) the outcome affects a significant number.

However the overall potential for groups and organisations involved in drama to influence policy is possibly not utilised to its fullest. Drama and theatre is a very powerful tool; with the capacity to motivate. It has the ability to make tangible the issues and concerns which on paper would not be fully appreciated by the reader (policy influencer). However, research has indicated that while there may be a knowledge of policy itself there is a lack of knowledge of how the policy machine works in practice. Participatory drama and theatre practice has the potential for providing local communities and communities of interest with the "artistic means to collectively and democratically express their concerns and passions in their own, albeit aesthetically mediated, voices" (Community Theatre,

Global Perspectives, page 255). Drama and theatre can have an impact on breaking down barriers of marginalisation and disadvantage and can be used as a tool for empowerment with local communities and communities of interest. This requires long-term work so skills can be passed on. The increased participation and the resultant benefits (confidence building, awareness raising, empowerment etc) may play a role in instigating social change over time.

As a direct result of participation in community-based drama and theatre practice, marginalised groups, some of whom are homeless people, have been accepted into the Theatre Studies course in DCU (though not a policy influencer – this aspect and other similar benefits needs to be recognised).

Drama and theatre projects that involve local communities can develop new, independent, initiatives for social change. For example after a project conducted by Smashing Times finished (Women Acting for a Better World), a number of local women who were involved went on to establish a cultural group consisting of both men and women and established a series of workshops with professional artists to explore various arts forms such as photography and how those art forms could be used to explore social issues in the community (though not a direct policy

influencer – this aspect and other similar benefits needs to be recognised).

Drama and theatre projects taking place with local communities and communities of interest have shown potential for influencing policy – even when policy influence is not a part of the original aims and objectives. However, for the project to be developed to incorporate policy influence (if this is what the arts organisation wish), policy influence needs to be included as a direct aim at the planning stages of each project. This requires a stronger awareness of what policy is, how it can be influenced, access to training in processes that can be applied and funding for the additional work.

Access to professional drama facilitation of a high standard is essential to ensure quality arts practice at a local level and the work needs to be of a high quality, well organized and structured. In addition, having access to a professional drama facilitator/artist with knowledge and/or experience of using drama/theatre to influence policy can assist local organisations that may wish to use drama/theatre for policy influence.

Drama and theatre can provide an exciting and innovative forum for bringing people's opinions to the policy-makers. For example developing a 'devised' performance to create awareness on a specific issue and then inviting politicians and other

relevant people to the performance and a post-show discussion or, alternatively, staging the performance in a high-profile location such as Leinster House or for local and/or national elections.

Ways forward may include: to encourage those wishing to influence policy through drama and theatre to consider existing models such as Augusto Boal's 'Legislative Theatre' with a view to modifying the archetype to be used in an Irish context; and for artists and participants who may wish to use drama and theatre to influence policy to come together to develop their own approach - perhaps using the work of Augusto Boal as a starting point.

Funding is a significant issue with specific reference to funding for professional arts organisations involved in participatory drama/theatre practice and for local organisations involved in community drama and theatre practice. There is a lack of support, particularly from the Irish Arts Council. Participatory drama and theatre practice needs wider recognition as an art form in its own right and more substantial, long-term support. For example there is a difference between the focus of the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland Arts Councils in relation to community arts practice. In Northern Ireland the community arts budget is the second biggest budget of the Northern Ireland Arts Council while in the Republic of Ireland the Arts

Council mainly fund professional drama and theatre practice and while they do support outreach and participatory arts practice, there is a lack of substantial, long-term support for professional arts organisations that put participatory drama and theatre practice at the core of what they do.

Many participatory-based or issued-based arts projects are funded through a small array of funding institutions whose core focus is not necessarily arts oriented. While this funding is welcome and should be continued, funding bodies dedicated primarily to the arts have a central role to play in funding participatory-based or issue-based arts projects. Participatory arts practice should be recognised by the Arts Council as equal to other art forms (parity of esteem) and merits financial support (particularly revenue funding of three to five-year cycles) for long-term work particularly for artistic companies such as Smashing Times which put outreach at the core of what they do and who are developing proven models of excellence and a level of specialisation in high quality participatory arts practice.

There is a worrying trend whereby (a) funding for participatory arts is mainly towards mainstream professional arts organisations with an outreach programme, but the outreach is not at the core of what the company does and (b) the outreach work tends to consist mainly of

one-off or short-term community-based projects, rather than long-term work which is essential if skills are to be passed on and genuine empowerment is to take place. One-off or short-term workshops and projects are beneficial and worthwhile but access is not honoured if funding is mainly given to this type of work. Is there a danger that companies will start to do outreach, particularly short-term work simply because it is now expected for funding purposes? Hopefully groups and organisations, through this and other research, will influence funding policy to include more support for long-term participatory arts/community arts practice. The provision of accredited training (for example the Smashing Times Diploma in Drama Facilitation Skills, accredited by University College Dublin) will ensure quality of best practice as drama and theatre in local contexts gain the recognition they deserve.

Agencies such as the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Arts Council (Republic of Ireland) have well-defined policy plans: organisational policy, artistic policy and influencing policy around issues that affect them and their members. It would appear that those artists and arts organisations involved with the councils may benefit from this as a knock-on affect, perhaps the provision of ongoing advice and assistance supporting organisations to include



policy as a directive within their overall structure. An organisation wishing to influence policy on a specific issue needs a structured plan detailing resources required, actions necessary, etc and they will benefit from the experience of working on their own internal policy plans and putting in place well-defined internal policy structures around, for example organisational development and artistic policy.

Arts organisations and support groups are already doing work in terms of policy influence such as lobbying government departments on specific issues or lobbying for increased funding overall for the arts: organizations such as CAF (Creative Activity for Everybody, an umbrella organisation for community arts in Northern

Ireland) whose activities include lobbying for improved support for community arts practice and holding international conferences to promote awareness of models of best practice both local and global; and Create, a leading national arts support organization providing services for arts development and practice in Ireland. Further research is required into how arts strategies are developed and cultural policy is promoted. Also, organising collective campaigns (arts organisations working together) can collectively create a stronger voice when advocating for policy change.

This booklet and the report it is based on are only a first step, and further research is required so that the potential to influence policy is

fully exploited. A second stage involving conclusive research is required to (a) identify and detail the specific supports and resources required (initial research has indicated that support systems are required to assist drama and theatre to influence policy, however, further research is required to develop these further) and (b) devise and develop a comprehensive manual on the 'how to' which will further enhance the potential for policy influence.

The second stage of research should identify all the supports and resources required to assist organisations in influencing policy if that is what they wish to do; actions, procedures, financial, models of good practice both national and international, training processes, etc.

# Using Drama and Theatre to influence policy

## ALL OUR FUTURES – UNITED KINGDOM

In the United Kingdom, a report entitled *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* was published in 1999 by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE). The report proposed a “radical revision of the education system, placing creativity at the centre of all subjects” ([www.artscampaign.org.uk](http://www.artscampaign.org.uk)) and was the result of a national inquiry commissioned by the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Culture, Media and Sport. “The Report argues that a national strategy for creative and cultural education is essential to unlock the potential of every young person in order for them to have the opportunity to contribute to the country’s economic prosperity and social cohesion.”

The report was submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. In 2000, the UK Government returned with a well-publicised, documented response stating that the report had an excellent analysis of the role of creativity and culture in education and gave a commitment to enhancing the place of creativity

and culture in education.

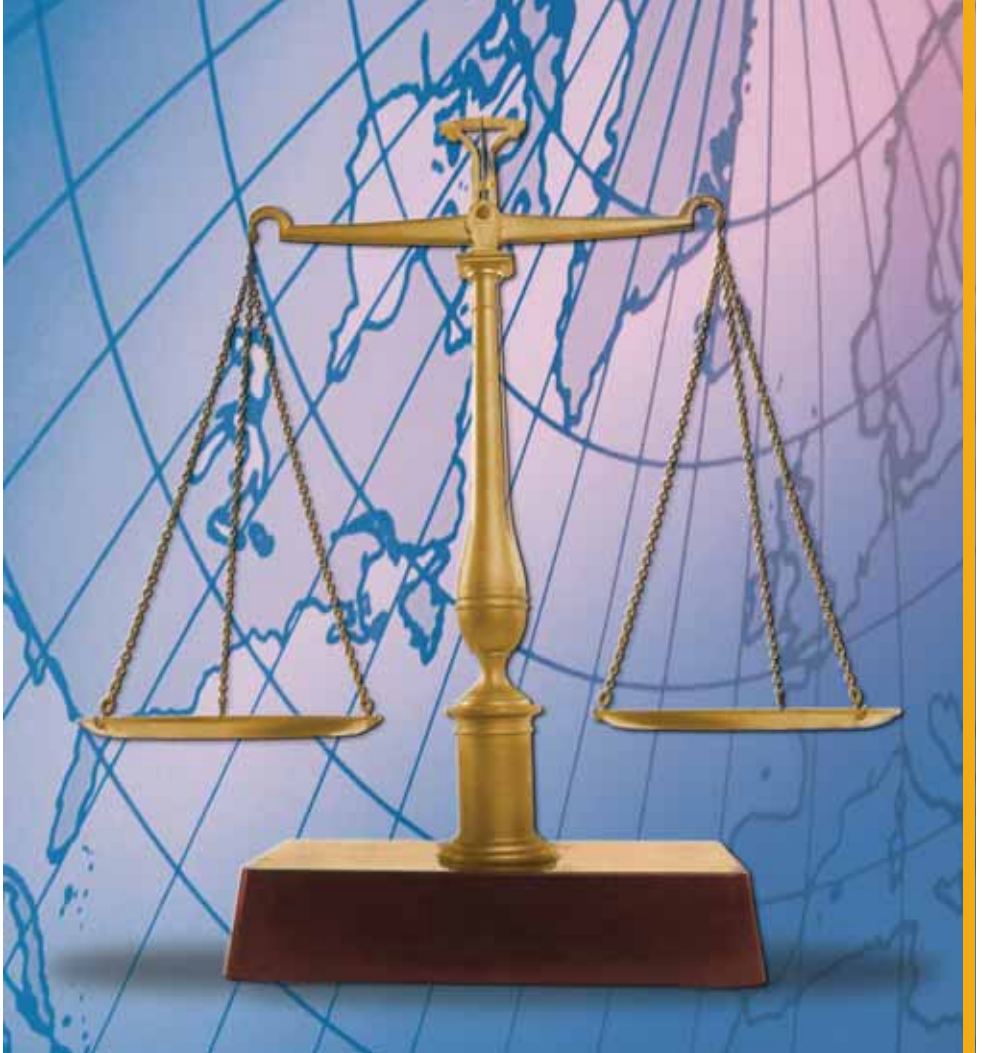
In 2000, the National Campaign for the Arts (NCA) received funding to publish a summary of *All Our Futures* with a view to ensuring that “all our teachers, arts practitioners and the general public will have access to this information” ([www.artscampaign.org.uk](http://www.artscampaign.org.uk)). The NCA was established in 1985 and aims to lobby and advocate government on behalf of the arts. The NCA received funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to produce 100,000 copies of the summary for distribution free to teachers and school governors throughout the country. “Since the publication of the summary the NCA has lobbied policy makers in the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Teacher Training Agency (TTA), Department for Education and Skills (DFES), Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Ofsted – the Office for Standards in Education, and local education authorities up and down the country.”

With regard to the *All our Futures* report, many organisations, government departments and officials have endorsed the recommendations in the report and the NCA and other organisations

continue to campaign for a full implementation of the report’s recommendations. In response to the initial report, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) were asked to look into teaching and learning practice in the classroom, including projects focussing on creativity and the arts and the DCMS and the QCA have since developed a number of important initiatives to promote guidance on how to develop the arts and creativity in schools.

## DRAMA AND THEATRE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In 2000 in the Republic of Ireland, Smashing Times commissioned an evaluation to assess the impact of the Smashing Times drama/theatre outreach programme on community development and the individual participants involved. The study, undertaken by Deirdre Toomey, found that the work had a core influence on community development. While not evaluating the impact of arts programmes on policy issues, the report itself became a policy-influencing tool. “It was envisaged that the potential role of community arts in combating issues of poverty and social exclusion would be highlighted with a view to informing relevant policy makers

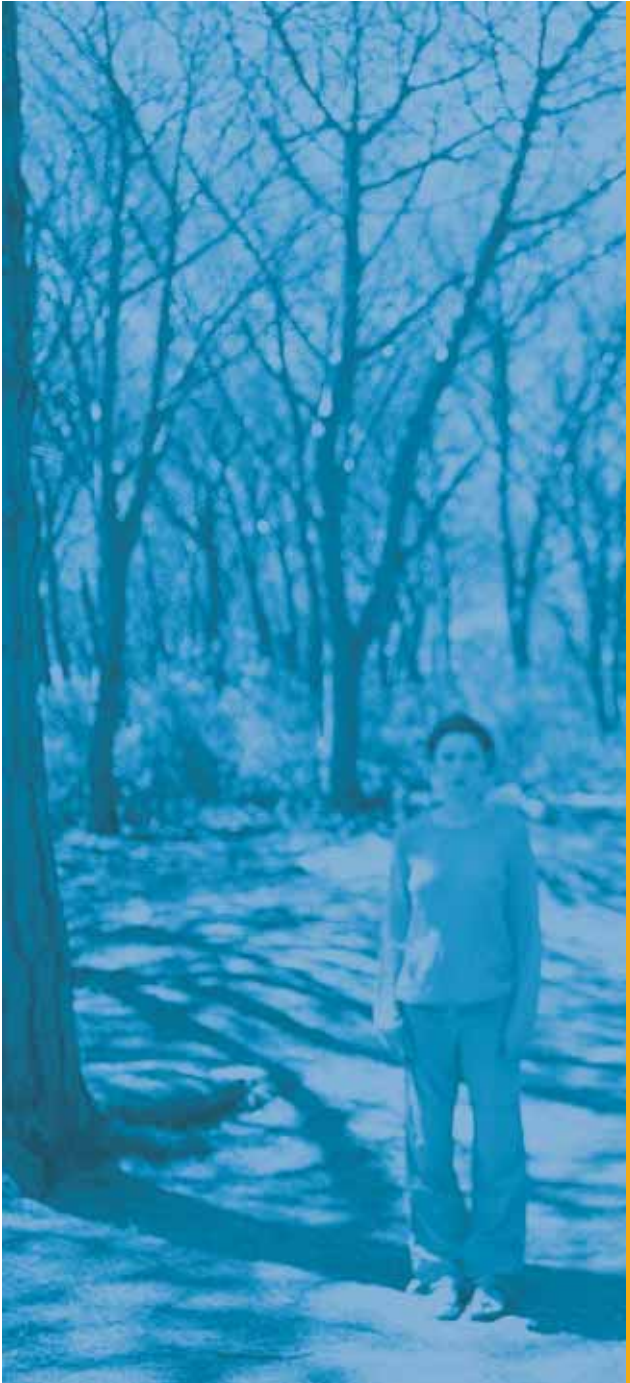


and encouraging the development of programmes that utilise the arts in this way.”

Within the broad realm of social policy, research indicates that marginalised and the socially excluded are less likely to participate in or attend arts performances “Evidence indicates

that few of those on low incomes attend arts events. In the context of the above it would seem crucial that forums are provided within areas of social and economic disadvantage to allow people to explore their cultural identity and examine issues affecting their lives. Community arts is one

means of encouraging participation in the arts and is particularly useful in that it has much in common with community development which, largely due to the fact that it involves people in decision making on issues that affect them, has been recognised as an important tool in combating



poverty and social exclusion.”

The report finds that participatory arts practice...being as focused on the process as the event itself, coupled with the corresponding association to community development, encourages more participation from excluded and marginalised communities / individuals. “Community arts practice has proven to be a valuable means of enabling experiences of the arts for people living in poverty and experiencing disadvantage...Not alone can participation in such arts activities be central to the development of the individual, it can also contribute to a community development process.”<sup>4</sup>

Overall the evaluation report found that “in terms of power relations and participation; evidence of the use of drama to influence policy was not hugely significant, though its potential was recognised”. Furthermore, “while there was little evidence of community drama groups attempting to influence public policy through their work, there was some indication that participants in drama groups can affirm and assert their own cultural identity through workshops and performances, in that the work tends to focus on everyday life and issues relevant to their local community. The emphasis on cross-border work illustrates an increased understanding between the drama groups in the North & South of Ireland”.

This, coupled with other findings arising from the evaluation, would lead one to believe that there is potential for drama and theatre in local contexts to affect and influence policy, however, additional support services and funding are required for this to be developed further.

## **PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF USING DRAMA AND THEATRE TO INFLUENCE POLICY**

The following are examples only as the scope of this research does not allow for detailed case studies:

In Northern Ireland, residents were unhappy at vehicles parking at their front doors and devised a video *Our Street is not a Car Park*. The video was sent to the Department of the Environment and without delay double yellow lines were marked outside their homes – impacting on local authority roads policy.

Smashing Times Theatre Company run Drama in the Docklands, an ongoing Dublin Docklands Development Authority programme that promotes creativity and access to theatre skills in the docklands area of Dublin. For four years, the children from City Quay National School, City Quay and St. Josephs National School, East Wall have enjoyed a full programme of events in relation to drama and theatre practice.

“This programme is hugely successful and should be

introduced to 2nd and continue with 5th class...

Parents/guardians/children ‘sing its praises’ all year long. Long may it continue... The overall response to the drama programme... continues to be extremely positive. As the curriculum is changing the teachers can see the benefits of drama and how it supports and provides added value to the curriculum. There appears to be a great need for teachers (particularly those not recently graduated) to receive training in using drama in the primary classroom. This would allow for the benefits the children experienced on this programme to be received by a wider audience. It was felt that the drama workshops have assisted the children with the development of a positive self-esteem and this has translated into a positive attitude to learning.”

As a result of the success of Drama in the Docklands, the schools have now included an arts policy in the curriculum, as a tool for personal and social development. The project has received further support from the Dublin Docklands Development Authority to run for another four years – 2005 to 2009 – and will be expanded to other classes in the school.

Women Acting for a Better World was a Smashing Times pilot project using drama workshops and a professional theatre performance to explore development education particularly

in relation to the experiences of women from Ireland and from around the world. The project involved women from ethnic minority communities and men and women from the north-west inner city of Dublin – bringing people together at a local level to explore ideas for creating a more just and equal society. After the project ended, a number of local women went on to establish a cultural group consisting of both men and women to explore various arts forms such as photography and how those art forms could be used to explore social issues in the community. Though not a direct policy influencer, this aspect needs to be recognised in terms of potential to initiate action for social change. Arising out of this project a play exploring the experiences of violence against women in war was produced. *May Our Faces Haunt You* was presented in Dublin and Belfast. The Belfast performances were followed by a post-show discussion with guest speakers Vivienne Forsythe of Concern and Patricia Campbell from Amnesty International as part of the Amnesty International Campaign against violence against women.

## **International Examples – Forum and Legislative Theatre:**

Forum and legislative theatre are techniques developed by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theatre director, dramatist, theorist, teacher and founder of the international



movement 'Theatre of the Oppressed'. Boal developed theatre of the oppressed as a revolutionary programme to return theatre to the people and it includes newspaper theatre, invisible theatre, image theatre, forum theatre, 'cop in the head' techniques and legislative theatre. Boal writes that theatre of the oppressed "emphasizes theatre as a language (to be spoken) rather than a discourse (to be understood), as a process (to be developed) rather than a finished product (to be consumed)". His work is based on a search for alternatives, rather than finding absolute truths. For Boal a main aim is to change people from passive spectators, passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon, into subjects, into actors or transformers of the dramatic action.

Forum Theatre is a theatre of the oppressed method in which "a scene demonstrating an oppression is presented by actors and then replayed with spontaneous interventions by audience members who replace the protagonist. The aim is twofold: to find ways to combat a specific oppression and to create maximum opportunity for participation" (Routledge Performance Practitioners, Augusto Boal, page 142). A short scene or play is developed to demonstrate oppression, which a group of people or a community is engaged in. In many cases, the "actors" are

the members of the group. The short scene or play shows a protagonist trying unsuccessfully to overcome the oppression, generally ending with a crisis point. After the short scene or play has been performed, audience members are then invited by the drama facilitator, or "Joker", to intervene in the scene or play by replacing one of the characters, and to explore alternative actions that could lead to a solution. The audience member tries out her/his idea in the scene as that character. The scene may be replayed several times with different interventions. The result is a dialogue about the issues that can lead to new understandings and an examination of alternative possibilities and choices. Legislative Theatre takes forum theatre into the political arena, where audience interventions are translated into recommendations for public policy. Legislative theatre was first developed in 1993 when Augusto Boal was elected Vereador (Member of the Legislative Chamber) for Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. "Legislative theatre aims to 'theatricalise politics' by establishing a direct line of communication between Theatre of the Oppressed explorations at grass roots level and an actual law-making process" (Routledge Performance Practitioners: Augusto Boal, page 143). Legislative Theatre is a method in which Forum Theatre is used as a basis for the formulation of policy, rules

or legislation. Boal uses theatre forums as a way of asking the community he represented what laws they would like to see introduced or changed, what legislation they would like to have for addressing community problems. Following on from this, Boal introduced 34 bills, which generated 13 new laws that benefited his constituents (Boal was a member of parliament for Rio de Janeiro from 1993 to 1996). Legislative Theatre thus became a way for ordinary citizens and community members to participate in creating law in new and immediate ways.

### **Ariadne/Radical Street Performance**

The following is a description of a street performance called In Mourning and In Rage (that took place in Los Angeles, USA) that combines artistic imagery with political issues and it illustrates how the performance captured the attention of the media and drew wide coverage to the serious political issue of violence against women. "Ten seven-foot tall heavily-veiled women stepped silently from a hearse. As reporters announced to cameras, 'We are at City Hall to witness a dramatic commemoration for the ten victims of the Hillside Strangler', the women in black delivered an unexpected message. They did not simply grieve but attacked the sensationalized media coverage that contributes to the climate of



violence against women. One at a time, the actresses broke their ominous silence (moving out of the group presentation to speak into a microphone) to link these murders with all forms of sexual violence (an analysis missing from the media) and to demand concrete solutions...City council members promised support to activists...and news programmes across the state carried reports of the performance and its activist message...follow-up talk show appearances and activities by local rape hot line advocates created a much broader discussion of the issues than could

be covered at the performance itself" (Radical Street Performance, an international anthology, page 41). The performance was presented by Ariadne, "a social arts network, an exchange between women in the arts, governmental politics, women's politics and media". Though not strictly theatre, the performance has elements of it and is an example of how artists can collaborate with activists in relation to specific issues.

**Note:** With regard to utilising international practices – for

example adapting the work of Augusto Boal to an Irish context – this requires commitment and funding. The work of Augusto Boal has obviously made an impact on professional and community theatre, not alone in its reference to policy influence. While some groups have used forum theatre in Ireland, legislative theatre on the other hand is a particular type of theatre quite specifically dedicated to influencing legislation [policy] and one must take cognisance of the legislative process in Brazil, from whence this type of theatre originated. Can this be replicated

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING – THEATRE:

- **Johnston, Chris** (1998), *House of Games, Making Theatre from Everyday Life*, Routledge, London.
- **Poulter, Christine** (1993), *Playing the Game*, Macmillan, London.
- **Boal, Augusto** (1992) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Routledge, London.
- **Boal, Augusto**, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Pluto Press, London.
- **Boal, Augusto** (1995) *Rainbow of Desire*, Routledge, London.
- **Boal, Augusto** (1998) *Legislative Theatre*, Routledge, London.
- **Brook, Peter** (1990) *The Empty Space: A great theatre director gives his views on the making of drama*, Penguin, London.
- **Cohen-Cruz, J.** (ed) (1998) *Radical street performance*, Routledge, London/New York.
- **Kershaw, B.** (1999) *The radical in performance*, Routledge, London.
- **Baggage, Frances**, (2004) *Routledge Performance practitioners*, Augusto Boal, Routledge, London.
- **Van Erven, Eugene** (2001) *Community Theatre, Global Perspectives*, Routledge, London and New York.
- **Grant, David** *Playing the Wild Card, Community Drama and Smaller-scale professional theatre. A Community Relations Perspective*. Published by Community Relations Council, 6 Murray Street, Belfast BT1 6DN, Northern Ireland.
- **Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd** – *Evaluation to Access the impact of the Smashing Times*
- **Arts Programme on Community Development By Deirdre Toomey**, October 2002. Available from Smashing Times Theatre Co. Ltd.
- **Willett, John** (Editor and Translator) *Brecht on Theatre – The Development of an Aesthetic*, Methuen, London.
- **Freire, Paulo**, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin



in Ireland? I think not in its absolute form, however taking the policy influence as the objective, can the model be adapted to an Irish context? This is an issue for those arts organisations and associations who see policy influence as part of their manifesto.

Boal's techniques evolved in response to social and political realities in South America. The experience of Smashing Times is that models of practice tend to grow organically out of the environment in which they are being created and each project has its own unique journey, no two models are ever identical. To transpose a model of practice in its entirety from one environment to another is not always possible. Also Augusto Boal himself has stated that his methods are not to be followed slavishly but are to be used as required by those interested in the work.

### Suggestions & Recommendations for the Future

To now take the research a step further and:

Carry our detailed research into the specific support systems required by drama and theatre organisations and local organisations that may wish to use the drama and theatre art form to influence policy. The research should be conclusive and include a detailed description of what

supports and resources groups/organisations need in their endeavour to influence, affect and impact on policy; what supports are available and what need to be developed; how the supports are accessed; what actions necessary are involved and how the groups/organisations go about achieving this.

The research to be documented in the form of a manual that can be used by a range of organizations involved in drama and theatre and who may wish to incorporate the influence of policy as an aspect of their work. The manual to include detailed case studies of models of best practice for using drama and theatre to influence policy and, in addition to developing awareness of what policy is, should aim to develop a better understanding of how policy is influenced, to develop awareness of 'how to' influence policy. The manual should outline the policy process and how those involved can affect and influence policy and should consist of a description of the policy machine and the elements within which it is interdependent and interconnected.

As there has been an indication of confusion around the policy process, the manual should adopt a simple, straightforward approach to explanation and description.

Smashing Times, being a professional organisation consisting of professional practitioners with a broad reach to

both the professional and community aspects of the arts, to circulate the manual either on request or by mass-mail; a decision to be taken by Smashing Times as the most appropriate and most effective.

For artists and participants who may wish to use drama and theatre to influence policy to come together to develop their own approach to using drama and theatre to influence policy – perhaps using the work of Augusto Boal as a starting point and/or to explore ways in which existing techniques such as Augusto Boal's legislative theatre practice can be adapted to an Irish context.

The issue of core revenue funding for professional arts organisations working primarily in participatory contexts or in issue-based drama and theatre practice needs to be addressed. Core funding sources can provide some security and enable organisations to incorporate policy directives within their own company structure as well as the space for training and the development of new models of practice. At the moment many of these companies are just working to survive.

The Arts Council should (a) recognise participatory arts practice as equal to other art forms (parity of esteem) (b) commit to financial support (particularly the provision of revenue funding) for long-term work particularly for artistic companies that put outreach at the core of what they

do and (c) in addition to supporting artistic benefits, also acknowledge and support the transformative benefits of participatory drama/theatre practice.

## **PERIODICALS:**

Publications are available from CREATE, CAF and Irishtheatre magazine covering arts and practice in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

## **Acknowledgements:**

- St. Vincent's Trust
- Shanty Education Project
- Training students from Smashing Times Theatre Company training programmes
- Community Technical Aid
- The Arts Council – Republic of Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Arts Council
- Trinity College Dublin
- CREATE
- CAF
- Sole Purpose Productions
  
- N.A.C. (National Arts Campaign); 1999
- Ken Robinson; Chairman of NACCCE
- Evaluation To Assess The Impact Of The Smashing Times Arts Programme On Community Development, available from Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd
- C.P.A. (Combat Poverty Agency) / Arts Council; 1997
- Evaluation for the Drama in the Docklands Schools Project; 2003 – 2004

